

Water Resources in the Upper Crab-Wilson Watershed (WRIA 43)

There are limited opportunities for new water uses in WRIA 43. In order to evaluate options for new uses, it is helpful to understand the overall water picture for the watershed.

The Upper Crab-Wilson watershed, often referred to as Water Resources Inventory Area (WRIA) 43, includes about 1,853 square miles in Adams, Grant, Lincoln and Spokane counties. The towns of Almira, Creston, Edwall, Odessa, Wilbur, and Wilson Creek and the cities of Harrington and a portion of Medical Lake occupy land in the watershed. Crab Creek is the major surface water source that flows through the watershed. The Upper Crab-Wilson watershed is part of the Odessa Groundwater Management Subarea, described below.

Water availability

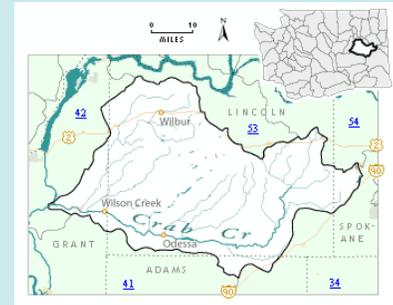
This watershed is not formally closed to new water uses. However, water levels are declining, so it is likely all available water is legally “spoken for.” Therefore any new water rights would be seasonal (interruptible), or the impacts of the water use would need to be fully offset (mitigated).

Many streams in WRIA 43 are subject to administrative restrictions known as Surface Water Source Limitations (SWSLs). Often these SWSLs will require that new water uses stop during low flow periods. Some groundwater connected to surface water sources may also be subject to SWSL restrictions.

Odessa Groundwater Management Subarea

This Subarea, established under WACs 173-128A and 173-130, encompasses southwestern WRIA 43 and all of eastern WRIA 41. Groundwater levels in the Odessa Subarea aquifer are declining in many places and as a result groundwater is not available for new uses.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is currently conducting a Special Study of the portion of the Odessa Subarea that is within the



WRIA 43

Definitions

Columbia Basin Project

(CBP): The irrigation network in central Washington made possible by the Grand Coulee Dam. Managed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

SWSL: Surface Water Source Limitation. Administrative restrictions on water availability established by Ecology after recommendation and consultation with the Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (RCWs 90.22, 90.03 & 90.05). The intent of a SWSL is to protect fish and wildlife habitat.

TMDL: Total Maximum Daily Load. A water quality improvement plan. A TMDL is a common sense, science-based approach to cleaning up polluted water so that it meets water quality standards.

Watershed Planning: Under RCW 90.82, a framework for developing local solutions to water-related issues on a watershed basis.

WRIA: Water Resources Inventory Area; also known as a watershed or river basin. For environmental management purposes, Washington is divided into 62 WRIsAs.

Columbia Basin Project (CBP), an irrigation network. The study is looking at options for using surface water to replace groundwater currently being pumped from the aquifer within the CBP area. The study is not evaluating options for delivering additional water outside the CBP area.

In 2006, the Odessa Subarea Conservation Relinquishment Exception was passed under Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6151 in an effort to encourage more efficient use of water in the Subarea. This statutory amendment allows Odessa aquifer groundwater users to use less than the full amount specified in their water right without being subject to relinquishment. (Relinquishment is the loss of all or part of a water right after five or more years of non-use.)

Water quality

Ecology recently started a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL, water cleanup plan) study for the Upper Crab-Wilson Creek watershed. Crab Creek has multiple listings on the 2008 Washington State Water Quality Assessment for pH, dissolved oxygen, and fecal coliform bacteria. However, the current lack of financial and technical resources has placed this effort on hold. Ecology's Water Quality Program continues to provide technical and financial help to support best management practices to meet water quality standards in the watershed.

Watershed planning

The watershed plan for WRIA 43 under the Watershed Planning Act (RCW 90.82) was approved in December 2006 and adopted by Lincoln, Grant, and Adams county commissioners at a joint session in March 2007. Funding was received in early 2008 to complete the Phase 4 detailed implementation plan. Instream flow studies were completed; however, because consensus was not reached on the proposed flow numbers, the watershed plan did not include numerical instream flow recommendations.

Shoreline master programs

Under the state's Shoreline Management Act (SMA) of 1971, counties and cities are required to develop plans and administrative ordinances to regulate development and protect shorelines of lakes, wetlands and streams. This includes protection of fish and wildlife habitat, public access, and navigation. Protecting water quality and the "natural character" of shorelines and shorelands are also objectives of the SMA.

The Lincoln County and the Odessa Shoreline Master Programs (SMP) are required to be comprehensively updated by December 1, 2014. Odessa adopted the Lincoln County SMP by reference in 1977. The portion of Adams County in WRIA 43 does not have any SMA jurisdiction.

Water rights in Washington State

Under state law, the waters of Washington collectively belong to the public and cannot be owned by any one individual or group. Instead, Ecology may grant individuals or groups the right to use them. Approval is given in the form of a water right permit.

Everyone needs a water right to use any surface water (water located above ground, such as lakes, rivers, streams and springs), or to use groundwater (water located under the ground) at a quantity of more than 5,000 gallons a day or to irrigate more than ½ acre of lawn and non-commercial garden (see RCW 90.44.050).

Much of the water in Washington State has already been appropriated, which means it is legally spoken for and being used. This is making it more difficult to find water supplies for new growth and development, while still leaving enough water in our lakes and rivers for instream resources and values such as wildlife, navigation, aesthetics, and water quality.

Ecology is working closely with communities to help them effectively manage their water, so we can meet current needs and help ensure future water availability for people, fish, and the natural environment.

Water right changes and transfers

More and more people are looking to change or transfer existing water rights to meet their water needs. Generally Ecology will consider changes to the following elements of a water right:

- Place of use
- Point(s) of diversion or withdrawal
- Purpose of use (including season of use).

Adams, Grant, Lincoln, and Spokane counties have established Water Conservancy Boards as an additional avenue to speed up the processing of water right change applications. The boards are required to follow the same laws and rules as Ecology when evaluating change applications to valid water rights. Changes may not result in an enlargement of the historic water right or impact other water rights, including established instream flows.



Crab Creek at Rocky Ford Road

For more informationOdessa Subarea

- The Odessa Subarea Special Study website:
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/cr_odessa.html

Shoreline Management

- Michael Maher, Shorelands & Environmental Assistance Program at 509-329-3584;
michael.maher@ecy.wa.gov
- Ecology website: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/SMA/index.html>

Watershed Planning

- Jaime Short, Shorelands & Environmental Assistance Program at 509-329-3411;
jaime.short@ecy.wa.gov
- Ecology website: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/watershed/index.html>

Water Quality

- David Knight, Water Quality Program at 509-329-3590; david.knight@ecy.wa.gov
- Ecology website: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/tmdl/index.html>

Water Rights

- General questions, Water Resources Program at 509-329-3400
- Ecology website: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/wrhome.html>

Other contacts

Department of Fish & Wildlife,
Eastern Region
509-892-1001
Email: teamspokane@dfw.wa.gov
<http://wdfw.wa.gov/reg/region1.htm>

Adams County Water Conservancy Board
Joyce McNeil at 509-659-1553
E-mail: adamcd@ritzcom.net

Grant County Water Conservancy Board
Robert Rolfness at 509-750-7589
E-mail: rolfb@accima.com

Lincoln County Water Conservancy Board
Rex Harder at 509-257-2800
Email: waterboard@co.lincoln.wa.us

Spokane County Water Conservancy Board
Doug Rider at 509-922-5127
Email: djr876@comcast.net

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